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# Wright State University Math and Statistics Department History

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Department of Mathematics and Statistics History

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**Early Wright State History**

The groundwork establishing Wright State University as the Dayton area's first public institution of higher learning was first laid in 1961, when Dayton was the second-largest metropolitan area in Ohio that had no public higher education facility. This lack had become critical due to Dayton's emerging presence as a high-technology center that needed an increasingly educated work force. Thanks to the foresight of many key community business leaders, a community-wide fundraising effort was begun in 1962 to raise "seed money" from private funds to establish a branch campus of The Ohio State University and Miami University in or near Dayton. The ultimate goal was to establish a campus with the potential to grow and quickly transition into an independent university. The college that would become Wright State University was founded in 1964 as the Dayton Branch Campus of Miami University and Ohio State University. At that time it was comprised of only a single building, Allyn Hall (named for Stanley Allyn, then-president of National Cash Register and one of the university's founders). Most of the land for the nascent university was donated by the United States Air Force from excess acreage of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

A 1965 act of the Ohio General Assembly stipulated that the Dayton branch campus would become an autonomous four-year institution once it reached an enrollment of 5,000 students. The name Wright State University was eventually chosen to honor the Wright Brothers, Dayton residents who invented the first successful aircraft in the city. On October 1, 1967, after enrollment passed the 5,000-student mark, Senate Bill 212 was passed, paving the way for Wright State to be chartered as an autonomous university.

More than 2,000 campaign workers recruited 10,000 contributers, who pushed the campaign over its $3 million goal in just over three months. The land needed for the campus was partially purchased and partially deeded to the state by the U.S. government from available land adjacent to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, and the construction of the campus' first building, Allyn Hall, was completed. In 1964, the Dayton Campus of Ohio State and Miami Universities was opened. In 1967, the Dayton Campus achieved status as an accredited and fully independent university, and the newly named Wright State University became Ohio's 12th state-assisted university.

During its early history, Wright State was characterized by rapid growth. When the then branch campus opened, 3,203 students were enrolled. That number increased to just over 12,000 by 1974, and, by 1984, that figure jumped to about 15,500. The 1990s saw student enrollment remain steady at around 16,000. More recently, growth in other areas has occurred. For example, Wright State has consistently ranked highly mong Ohio's state-assisted colleges and public universities in sponsored research.

**Early Departmental History**

In 1964 there were six Mathematics and Statistics faculty members, five (surprisingly) with Ph.D.'s: William Coppage, Robert Dixon, Leone Lowe, Marc Lowe, Donald Schaeffer, and Alphonso Smith. Dixon served as the first "coordinator" of the mathematics program. At that time, there was no formal mathematics department. The mathematics faculty were housed in the first university quadrangle building Allyn Hall.

William Coppage, hired from the faculty of Indiana State University, was Mathematics Coordinator for the 1965-1966 academic year. During this year, six additional Ph.D. faculty members were hired: Jerry Meike, Robert Haber, Joseph Kohler, Raymond Lewkowicz, Carl Maneri, David Sachs, and Robert Silverman. Haber, hired from the Syracuse University faculty, was Mathematics Coordinator 1966-1968. There were now 11 Ph.D. faculty, a fact noted by the Dayton Daily News.

During the early years, the department moved from Allyn Hall to Oelman Hall and finally, two years later, to Fawcett Hall (all quadrangle buildings). One end of the fourth floor of Fawcett was equipped with a ping pong table, which the faculty enjoyed daily. Wright State represented a very desirable job for early faculty members, offering many attractive features, including the active civic leadership of NCR that fostered cultural development, a relatively low cost of living and, importantly, WPAFB, which offered significant professional development opportunities for scientifically trained faculty. Early on, all engineering, mathematics, and science faculty were employees of Ohio State.

In 1967, Dixon, Kohler, and Schaeffer decided to become computer scientists. They began teaching computer science courses, eventually splitting off, together with engineering faculty, to form the computer science department.

Carl Maneri, hired in 1965 from the Syracuse University faculty, became the first formal Mathematics and Statistics department chair, serving during 1968-1971. The M.S. degree in mathematics was first offered in 1968. Krishan Gorowara, hired from the University of Montana faculty in 1970, served as chair during 1971-1976. He became the department's first full professor. David Sachs served as acting chair 1976-1977.

In 1978, the department hired Edgar Rutter, a full professor from the University of Kansas. He would guide the department for the next 20 years, building and strengthening the faculty and the department's academic programs.

**Significant Events 1978-98: The Building years**

Prior to 1978, the mission of the department was largely teaching. In 1978, the department began to increase its research activities and to develop applied programs. At this time, the department was a unit in the College of Science and Engineering. Ed Rutter encouraged faculty to engage in involvement in university activities and increased research emphasis. Research

efforts and faculty hiring were organized around groups in four subject areas—algebra and discrete mathematics, analysis, applied mathematics, statistics. Rutter pursued a strategic hiring initiative supporting these groups. The faculty increased in size during this time to 35 members and, as the university grew, the department's teaching credit hour responsibilities increased dramatically.

In 1984, the department moved into its present building, the newly constructed Engineering and Mathematics Building, an extension of the existing Oelman Hall. New undergraduate and graduate concentrations in applied mathematics, applied statistics, and computer science were introduced. Statistics B.S. and M.S. degrees were created, and with them came a variety of new courses. Research activity began to increase, with faculty competing successfully for external research funding. Faculty began to gain university-wide recognition, being honored with various awards for excellence in research, teaching, and service. Notably, undergraduate research, has been supported for over 20 years by professor Arasu through AFOSR, NSA, and NSF grants. Faculty began taking advantage of sabbaticals, and publications and the travel budget increased. The department began to be recognized externally for its success in research.

During the growth years, the department took seriously its efforts to shepherd faculty through promotions and tenure awards. An active colloquium series blossomed with invited speakers on most Friday afternoons. A weekly discrete mathematics seminar was instituted that continued for more than 20 years. The Wright Math program was developed to encourage minority students to study mathematics. Mathematics and statistics faculty, through extensive committee participation, continued to gain greater university visibility. Computer laboratories were instituted in support of a "reform" calculus initiative. Involvement in teacher education was broadened and strengthened with the forming of a mathematics education group, with mathematics educators active in local high schools and the greater Ohio mathematics education community. With the addition of this group of faculty, the department established the B.S.program in mathematics education. Modeling on a Virginia Polytechnic Institute center, Barbara Mann led the creation of the Statistical Consulting Center, a unit devoted to filling the university-wide faculty and student need for expertise in designing statistical experiments and analyzing and interpreting collected data. After Mann's retirement in 1993, Harry Khamis served as director of the consulting center until his retirement in 2015. Eventually obtaining continuous budgeting, the consulting center has grown and continues to flourish today.

Computers and concurrent technology came to the department with Richard Mercer and Jim Vance leading the effort. Initially the department ran its own data and communications operations. Faculty experimented with early (SE MacIntosh) desktop computers, eventually learning how to independently produce instructional materials. As email became indispensable, the department bought and operated its own server. New softwares appeared—Matlab, Mathematica, TeX, Microsoft Word—revolutionizing desktop composition/publishing. Now faculty had access to technological tools for increased productivity. Through House Bill funds, faculty received new personal computers approximately every two years. Starting in 2005, the faculty at Wright State became unionized, and the department bylaws that set faculty evaluation and promotion/tenure criteria became part of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

**1998-Present**

After Rutter stepped down as chair, Joanne Dombrowski became acting chair for one year. Manley Perkel served as chair for the next five years, and subsequently Dan Voss served as chair for two years, before being appointed associate dean of the college. Joanne Dombrowski again served as acting chair for two years until Wefu Fang was hired from the faculty of West Virginia University as chair in 2008.

Weifu headed the department for the next seven years, leading it through semester conversion, reorganization of the Developmental Mathematics program introducing the ALEKS software system, and the development of a biostatistics track in the M.S. applied statistics program. He also oversaw the creation of five-year combined B.S./M.S. mathematics and sStatistics programs, the actuarial science track in the B.S. statistics program, and a certificate program in mathematics and statistics. He began an effort to expand faculty research capacity into the areas of biostatistics and computational mathematics, with the goal of increasing interdisciplinary research collaboration and creating opportunities for new academic program development.

During Weifu's tenure as chair, the department maintained its faculty size of about 32 professors and eight instructors/lecturers. It continued to cultivate faculty research capabilities and to emphasize the teaching mission in meeting the increasing demand for service course instruction. Faculty continued to receive prestigious recognitions and competitive grants for their research, and to become involved in various curricular development and instructional initiatives. Under his leadership and that of Yi Li, the college dean, in conjunction with the physics department, the department helped to develop an interdisciplinary Ph.D. program, the interdisciplinary applied science and mathematics program.

Ayse Sahin was hired from the DePaul University faculty to assume the leadership of the department as chair, beginning Fall Semester 2015.